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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement submitted by Graduate Women International (GWI), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status*

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[23 May 2026]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Breaking Education Barriers through Sport and Education

Graduate Women International (GWI), an international membership-based non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council since 1947, welcomes the panel discussion at the sixty-second session of the Human Rights Council (HRC62) on efforts to intensify United Nations action to empower women and girls through sport. GWI affirms that participation in sport contributes positively to educational engagement, leadership development, confidence, and the full and meaningful participation of women and girls in society. At a time when significant barriers to equal participation in sport persist globally, GWI urges stronger coordination between education, gender equality, and sport policy frameworks to ensure that sport is recognized as an important contributor to reducing education and leadership barriers. To support practical implementation, GWI presents its principal recommendations at the outset of this statement, followed by supporting analysis. Through its international network of graduate women across 48 countries, GWI remains actively engaged with Member States and United Nations entities to advance policies and initiatives that expand the rights, participation, and educational opportunities of women and girls through sport. Recommendations:

- Integrate sport participation into national education policies and learning strategies as mechanisms for supporting leadership development, educational engagement, and participation for women and girls.
- Ensure equal access for girls and women to safe, accessible, inclusive, and adequately funded sporting opportunities at all levels of education through sustained political commitment, targeted programs, increased public investment, and gender-responsive budget allocations.
- Strengthen support for educational institutions and community programs that encourage girls' sustained participation in sport.
- Increase investment in safe, accessible, and gender-responsive educational and sporting infrastructure, including sanitation facilities.
- Expand equal access to digital education and technological resources through targeted educational programs and public investment that support participation and inclusion in emerging areas connected to sport, communication, and media.
- Strengthen cooperation with civil society organizations, educational institutions, women's organizations, and youth networks through coordinated policy development, partnerships, and community-based programs that advance the rights and opportunities of women and girls through education and sport.
- Increase the representation and leadership of women in sport governance, administration, coaching, officiating, and policy development.

For 107 years, Graduate Women International (GWI) has advocated for safe access to quality education beyond primary school and lifelong learning opportunities up to the highest levels. Over the past decade, GWI has increasingly highlighted within its international advocacy the relationship between sport participation, girls' educational engagement, leadership development, and gender equality. Through United Nations engagement and advocacy connected to the annual observance of the International Day of Sport for Development and Peace (6 April)[1], GWI has emphasized that participation in sport supports confidence, teamwork, communication skills, resilience, together encouraging continued participation in education. These priorities closely align with international efforts to advance Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 on quality education and SDG 5 on gender equality, both central to GWI's mission and advocacy.

At the fifty-fourth session of the HRC, GWI, together with 11 ECOSOC-accredited co-sponsoring organizations, submitted a written statement calling for stronger integration of sport within education and gender equality policy frameworks. [2] The statement drew attention to continuing barriers that limit equal participation by women and girls, including gender-based violence, discriminatory social norms, and unequal access to facilities, resources, and leadership opportunities. It further emphasized that the relationship between

sport, education, and equality is reflected across major international frameworks, including the SDGs, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNESCO's International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport, and the Beijing Platform for Action. GWI and its co-sponsors therefore urged States to strengthen policy coordination and public investment that expand inclusive participation opportunities, support women's leadership in sport, and improve access for marginalized groups, including refugees and persons with disabilities. GWI draws the attention of States to the continued relevance of these recommendations within the present HRC62 discussion and broader international policy debates concerning financing education and sport.

Against this international policy background, GWI emphasizes that the relationship between sport, education, and gender equality requires greater attention within both national education systems and international development frameworks. Despite growing international recognition of the importance of sport for women and girls, implementation has often remained uneven, particularly regarding equal access to safe, inclusive, and adequately funded sport and physical education opportunities. Persistent barriers continue to limit participation, including discriminatory social norms, violence and harassment, insufficient infrastructure, and unequal access to resources and leadership opportunities.

In response to these continuing implementation gaps, GWI stresses the importance of evidence-based approaches that integrate sport more effectively within education systems and broader gender equality strategies. GWI further acknowledges UNESCO's position that sport and physical education contribute to the development of physical, social, and emotional competencies associated with self-confidence, inclusion, civic participation, and academic achievement[3], while also helping challenge discriminatory gender stereotypes and expand opportunities for leadership and public participation. [4] Within this context, GWI encourages States to strengthen coordination between education and sport sectors to ensure girls and young women have equal access to safe, inclusive, and adequately funded school-based sport and physical education programs. Such measures include investment in facilities, gender-sensitive teacher and coach training, safeguarding measures to prevent violence and harassment, and opportunities for girls to participate in leadership and decision-making within school and community sport structures.

GWI welcomes the growing body of international research demonstrating the relationship between sport participation, leadership development, and increased educational and professional opportunities for women and girls. As reflected in GWI advocacy connected to the annual observance of the International Day of Sport for Development and Peace, [5] evidence indicates that girls who participate in sport are more likely to develop confidence, leadership capacity, teamwork, and decision-making skills associated with long-term educational engagement and future professional advancement. These findings further reinforce the importance of ensuring equal access to safe and inclusive sport opportunities for girls and young women.

Beyond individual outcomes, sport also supports broader international objectives relating to peaceful societies, intercultural understanding, social inclusion, and civic participation. GWI recognizes the longstanding position of the United Nations that sport can serve as an effective platform for dialogue, mutual respect, cooperation, and engagement across social, cultural, ethnic, religious, and political differences. Within this context, GWI encourages States to integrate sport more systematically within national education, gender equality, and social inclusion strategies, while increasing investment in programs that support the equal participation and leadership of women and girls at all levels of sport and align with United Nations SDG 16 commitments.

GWI further recognizes the importance of women's leadership within sporting institutions and decision-making structures as an essential component of equitable sport governance. The meaningful participation of women in sport administration, coaching, officiating, and policy development helps ensure that the perspectives and priorities of women and girls are reflected within institutional decision-making processes while contributing to safer, more inclusive, and more accessible sporting environments. [6] Within this context, GWI encourages Member States, educational institutions, sporting federations, and related organizations to adopt policies and leadership strategies that support the equal participation, advancement, and visibility of women across all levels of sport governance and administration.

GWI therefore reiterates that efforts to intensify United Nations action relating to sport and development should remain grounded in the principles of accessibility, inclusion, equal opportunity, and the full participation of women and girls. In alignment with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly SDGs 3, 4, 5, and 16, GWI encourages continued cooperation among Member States, United Nations entities, educational institutions, sporting organizations, and civil society to advance safe, inclusive, and equitable sport participation opportunities for all women and girls.

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- [1] <https://graduatewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/IDSDP-Infographic-2.pdf>
[2] https://graduatewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/GWI-HRC54-Written-Statement-Call-on-States-to-Harness-Sports-Potential_Cosponsors_FINAL-UN-Submission.pdf
[3] <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/sports-education-girls>
[4] <https://www.unesco.org/en/gender-equality-women-empowerment-sports-and-science>
[5] <https://graduatewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/2025-Intl-day-of-sport-for-development-and-peace-Infographic-FINAL.pdf>
[6] <https://graduatewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/UNESCO-Sport-and-Gender-Equality-Game-Plan-Highlights.pdf>